

Congressman Nadler Takes on Problem of Out-of-Date Text Books

Thursday, 13 June 2002

NEW YORK - Textbooks used by many of America's students are woefully out of date, and updating them needs to be a priority of the Federal government, Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) said today at a press conference announcing introduction of a bill to do just that. He announced introduction of the Building Opportunities for Our Kids (BOOK) Bill at P.S. #191 in Manhattan, where he kicked off a tour of local schools.

"The President is a big fan of saying that we should 'Leave No Child Behind,'" said Rep. Nadler. "Unfortunately, for many, we've left them back in the last century with no hope of catching up."

A survey conducted by the Association of American Publishers found that one in four teachers report using textbooks that are more than 10 years old. More than half of teachers say their students are exposed to incorrect information in outdated textbooks. Even more troubling, 40 percent of teachers report that they have more students in their classrooms, than they have textbooks.

"This is absolutely unacceptable," said Rep. Nadler. "How can we expect our children to learn and succeed under these conditions? How can we talk about teacher accountability when those accountable for providing funding consistently overlook these problems?"

The BOOK Bill would do the following:

Section 1: Authorizes \$500 million over the next five years for the purchase of new textbooks for Title I schools throughout the country. Currently, there is no federal money earmarked solely for the purchase of textbooks.

Section 2: Requires the Secretary of Education to set up a Textbook Recycling Program. Some public schools can afford to replace textbooks every year or every few years. Instead of these schools simply throwing away these relatively new books, this bill would set up a program in which the books could be donated to Title I schools that would like to incorporate them into their curriculum.

Section 3: Commissions the Government Accounting Office to conduct a national study on the condition of textbooks used in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States.

Rep. Nadler added, "Expecting kids to learn without books is like trying to drive without any fuel. It is simply impossible. My bill will supply our nation's kids with one of the most essential tools they'll need to succeed. Then we can truly say that we've left no child behind."

The bill was immediately endorsed by the National Education Association as well as the United Federation of Teachers.

Rep. Nadler has served in Congress since 1992. He represents the 8th Congressional District of New York, which includes parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Statement by Congressman Nadler

On the Introduction of the B.O.O.K. Bill

Why do students in our public schools not know that the Berlin Wall has fallen? Or that Nelson Mandela was freed from prison and elected to lead South Africa? Why do they think Ronald Reagan is still President? Or that there are Soviet troops in Afghanistan and not U.S. troops? Why do their science books still brag that one day scientists will decode the human genome?

Because, according to their textbooks, these events have yet to take place. All across the nation, students are forced to use books that have long been out of date. In Fall of 2000, the Utah Education Association found elementary schools using maps from 1950 and encyclopedias from 1966. In Oregon's largest school district, students regularly use the same books, maps, and globes that their predecessors used more than 15 years ago. In Texas, teachers scramble to create their own worksheets and labs because their textbooks do not cover the material mandated by the new state curriculum standards. In California, students read books that devote entire chapters to countries that no longer exist. In Omaha, teachers can't assign homework because there are not enough books for each student to take home. And in New York City, many of the books are older than some of the teachers.

These problems are shared by schools in every part of the country. The President is a big fan of saying that we should "Leave No Child Behind." Unfortunately, for many, we've left them back in the last century with no hope of catching up.

A survey conducted by the Association of American Publishers found that one in four teachers report using textbooks that are more than 10 years old. More than half of teachers say their students are exposed to incorrect information in outdated textbooks. Even more troubling, 40 percent of teachers report that they have more students in their classrooms, than they have textbooks.

This is absolutely unacceptable. How can we expect our children to learn and succeed under these conditions? How can we talk about teacher accountability when those accountable for providing funding consistently overlook these problems?

The situation has only been exacerbated by new rigorous curriculum standards instituted by federal and state governments. Yes, we all want our children to be challenged and to reach their potential. But at the same time, we must recognize that without the proper tools, students will not only fail to meet these new requirements, they will struggle just to learn basic reading and writing skills.

Expecting kids to learn without books is like trying to drive without any fuel. It is simply impossible.

And we must also recognize the additional strain this puts on our already overburdened teachers. Without books, they are forced to fill in the gaps by creating their own worksheets and manuals. Others use their own money to purchase materials - a tremendous sacrifice on a teacher's salary. It's no wonder that we are unable to attract enough people to teach in our public schools.

We must not let this go on any longer.

Today, I am pleased to announce that I am introducing the Building Opportunities for Our Kids Bill. The B.O.O.K. Bill authorizes \$500 million over the next five years for the purchase of new textbooks for our nation's neediest public schools. It also creates the Textbook Recycling Program. Under this voluntary program, schools that can afford to replace textbooks on a regular basis could donate their books to Title I schools. These two measures will set us on the right track for providing our children with up-to date textbooks and giving them the quality education they need and deserve.

I would like to thank Elena Nasserdeen, the Principal of PS 191 and all of the students, faculty, and staff for welcoming us into their community today. They have a wonderful school here which has only made me more committed to fighting for additional funding so that PS 191, and other schools around the country, can continue to grow and flourish.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation and admiration to all public school teachers who, despite less than ideal circumstances, are committed, day after day, to enriching the lives of our nation's children. We will forever be in debt to you. Thank you.

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